

ARTICLE APPEARED  
ON PAGE 31WALL STREET JOURNAL  
4 May 1984

## Duarte Victory Could Help Reagan Effort to Salvage Central America Aid Plan

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WASHINGTON — Jose Napoleon Duarte's likely victory Sunday in El Salvador's presidential election poses a double-edged sword for President Reagan in his own war at home with Congress over military aid to Central America.

Mr. Duarte's moderate, democratic image is a crucial asset for the Reagan administration in its struggle to win additional aid for El Salvador. Yet Mr. Duarte's flexibility toward negotiations and his credibility among liberals and moderates in the U.S. Congress also serves as a reminder of what critics contend is missing in Mr. Reagan's policies in the region.

"Duarte has met and talked on policy issues with more members of Congress than Ronald Reagan," says Rep. James Leach (R., Iowa). "The President has shaken more hands, but Duarte has really been around."

And even as Mr. Reagan seems on the verge of winning new aid for El Salvador, mistrust of the Central Intelligence Agency's covert war in Nicaragua has badly undercut support for that separate operation. The president has never been weaker on that second front. The Democratic-controlled House seems prepared to force a confrontation, and Mr. Reagan is pitted against a House Intelligence Committee that commands unusual personal and institutional ties within the chamber.

Mindful of this, senior Republicans are urging the President to use the Salvador elections—and a Duarte victory—as an opportunity to insert himself more directly in the debate by delivering a major address on Central America.

"Bring out the map and just get down to the dang fundamentals," says House Minority Leader Robert Michel (R., Ill.). Mr. Reagan's close friend, Sen. Paul Laxalt (R., Nev.), has made the same point in private talks with the president. "I think he has to get out and explain the policy," says Mr. Laxalt. "We politicians think that what we say is so profound that, once the bell rings, it rings forever. The interest span is short out there."

Recent debate has been clouded by the internal politics of congressional appropriations committees. The effects of the Salvadoran elections may start to become apparent next week when the House leadership is expected to bring the 1985 foreign-aid authorization bill to the floor. This will provide an opportunity for votes on El Salvador aid. And though this bill itself may never clear Congress, the debate will help determine later action on spending legislation.

The House Appropriations Committee voted Wednesday to ignore a Senate-passed bill providing \$61.8 million in military aid for the Salvadoran regime. But if Mr. Duarte is elected, Democrats are confident of winning approval for these funds. Mr. Duarte's effectiveness in El Salvador has been mixed, but to the U.S. Congress he remains one of the best-known Central American leaders and a man capable of coming to the Capitol and building constituencies for his country.

The debate seems certain to focus less on the level of aid and more on what conditions will be attached, with critics contending that conditions are needed to strengthen Duarte's ability to carry out a land redistribution program and end human-rights abuses.

The administration's real frustration is that, in its rush to win quick approval of some increased funding, it allowed the amount to be whittled down substantially from what Mr. Reagan first requested. After asking for \$178 million, the State Department came in for a down payment of \$92.8 million in March. To buy peace in the Senate before the first round of Salvadoran elections, the number was cut to \$61.8 million. Now, when the president has a chance to get more money, he finds the debate has been defined in terms of only a third of his original request.

The prospects are bleaker on funding for the CIA-backed war in Nicaragua. The disclosure last month of the agency's direct role in the mining of Nicaraguan harbors hurt the administration badly. And while CIA Director William Casey has patched up differences with influential senators, he and the entire operation are viewed with more suspicion.

"The heavy vote in the Senate won't repeat itself," says Sen. Daniel Inoué (D., Hawaii), who played a key role in securing both the El Salvador money and \$21 million for the CIA operation. "It won't be by the same margin."

The House voted twice last year to cut off funds for Nicaraguan rebels, and appears determined to enforce a \$24 million ceiling for the current fiscal year ending Sept. 30. The CIA can't legally spend above this level, and the issue portends a confrontation between Congress and the president.

The available funding may be stretched out until next month, but unless some compromise is reached U.S. support for the Nicaraguan operation will have to be ended. Mr. Casey, in closed-door congressional testimony yesterday, indicated that contingency plans haven't been made for ending U.S. assistance; but the remaining aid is estimated at less than \$1 million, according to intelligence sources.

It is a striking contrast from El Salvador, where congressional opposition always has been more vocal than real, because of fear of being blamed for a Communist takeover. In Nicaragua, the mining and CIA-supervised attacks on oil-storage tanks and a Salvadoran guerrilla radio station cast the U.S. as the aggressor, a much less comfortable role for Congress.

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